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THE MADERA COUNTY HISTORIAN

MADERA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY

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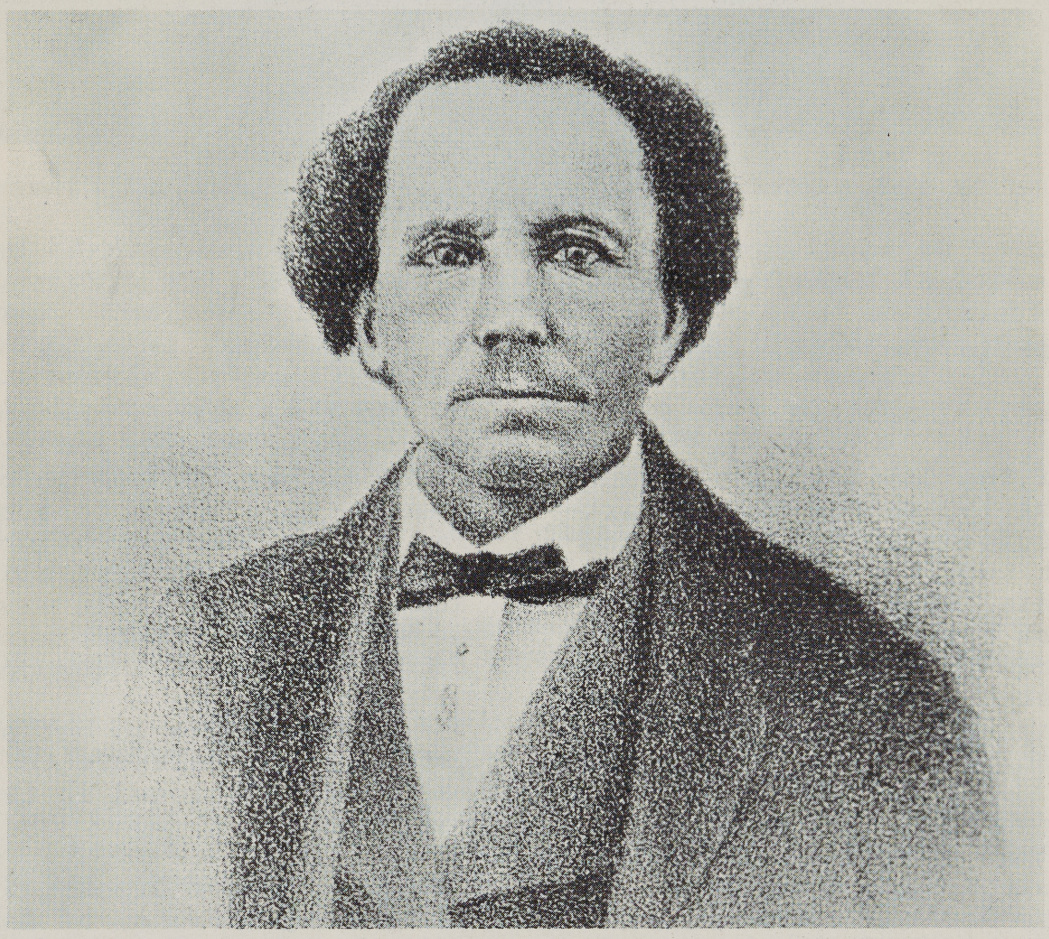


Jonathan Rea I

Among the old timers who once lived at Buchanan Hollow in Madera County was the Jonathan Rea family. Rea was the father of J. E. Rea, former Madera County probation officer.

The story of Jonathan Rea is full of romance and color. It involved several other well-known local families--the Daultons, Hildreths and Crooks, and tells the story of the beginning of the sheep industry on a large scale.

Buchanan Hollow was the home of the Jonathan Rea family.

As a young man back in North Carolina, Rea enlisted in the army to fight the Mexican War. When he received his discharge in 1846, he drifted up to the gold rush pickings in Sacramento.

Three years later, 1849, he decided to go into the sheep business. He went to Missouri in company with the Hildreth brothers, Thomas and Emphrey, who

Mrs. Agnes Hildreth Rea

wanted to start in the cattle business.

Train Organized

In Missouri the Californians organized a train of 150 wagons which started for California in 1850. During the three years it took for the train to reach California, many of the pioneers dropped out, or established homes along the way. (Three years must be an error as other research states the train left Missouri in May 1853 and reached San Gabriel Mission in November, 1853.)

Hired to lead the wagon train at the sum of $9 per month was the late Henry Clay Daulton, grandfather of Clay and Raynor Daulton of Madera. (Some historians quote salary at $15 instead of $9.)

The story is told that in Salt Lake City, Utah, the train stopped to rest. Thinking that the travelers would be too poor to pay for their keep and supplies, the Mormons began to cast longing eyes at the cattle and sheep the train was driving with them. They were amazed when Rea pulled out three sacks of gold from one of the wagons to pay for the grass and water the animals had eaten.

Tragedy Struck

The trip across the country was not without mishap and tragedy. A young mother, riding in one of the wagons, gave birth to a baby daughter. The mother died in childbirth, but her daughter was kept alive on sugar and water. The child was the mother of Will Crooks, later a successful cattle raiser of Ahwahnee.

(We were able to get some interesting facts relative to the little baby girl mentioned in the above paragraph.)

Mrs. Eleanor Crooks, wife of the late George Crooks, of Ahwahnee tells this story:

"Jonathan Rea while driving the sheep across the country, (we are not sure of the exact location, but it was in California) traveled slower than the wagons. One day he looked down from the hills above the trail and noted some unusual activity going on near some of the wagons. He went down and was informed that Mrs. Magoon, the mother of the little baby girl had died. They were burying her beside the wagon trail.

Ann Elizabeth Rea McKee

Eleanor Rea McCumber

The husband of Mrs. Magoon, was a doctor and he continued on to California with the wagon train and finally settled in Mariposa County in a place known as Lush Meadows. The baby girl was named Emma. She grew up and attended Mills College. Later she married Will Crooks Senior. Mr. Crooks came from New York and planned to settle in San Francisco and manufacture crackers for the miners but he found this was not a lucrative plan so he went up into the area of Ahwahnee and there met Emma Magoon. They were the parents of Will Crooks, Jr., later a county supervisor, and George Crooks.

This little story is included just to clear up the story of the baby girl because some historians tell it differently.

The wagon train came up the coast, crossing the mountains at Santa Rita and ferrying across the San Joaquin River to Madera County at Firebaugh.

Reaching Southern California, Jonathan Rea and Agnes Hildreth, a member of the party, were married. The wedding was performed in San Gabriel Mission.

Upon reaching their goal the members of the party scattered to various parts of the county. Rea, the Hildreth family and the Daulton family bought large tracts of land and homesteaded others.

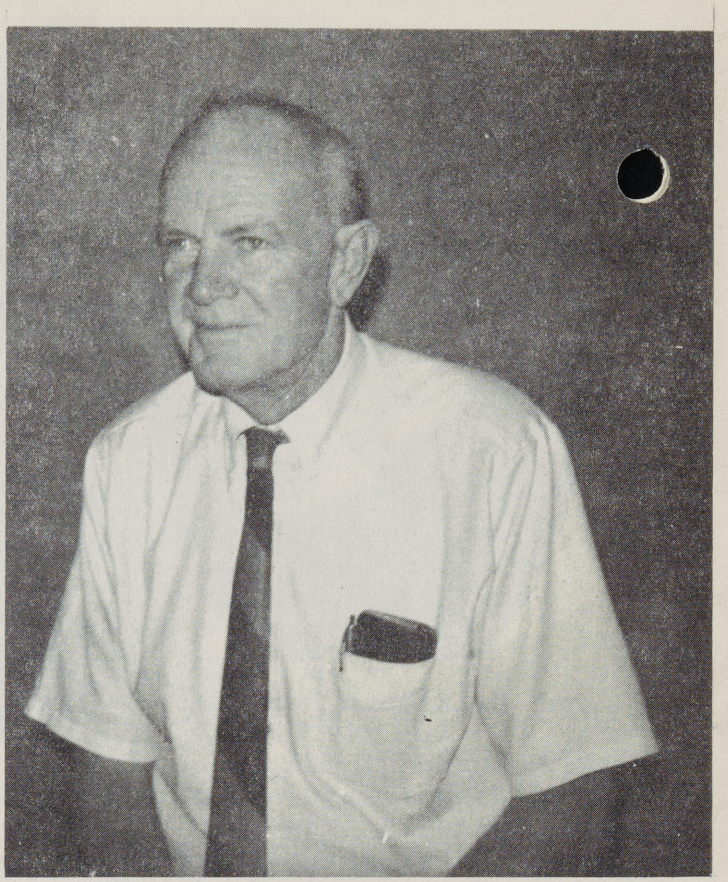
Price of the land at that time was $1.25 an acre. Greenbacks were worth 35 cents on the dollar and when turned in on government land purchases, secured much land for little money.

Though the Rea family settled in Buchanan Hollow, they owned eighteen or twenty thousand acres of land extending from Merced County to Fresno County.

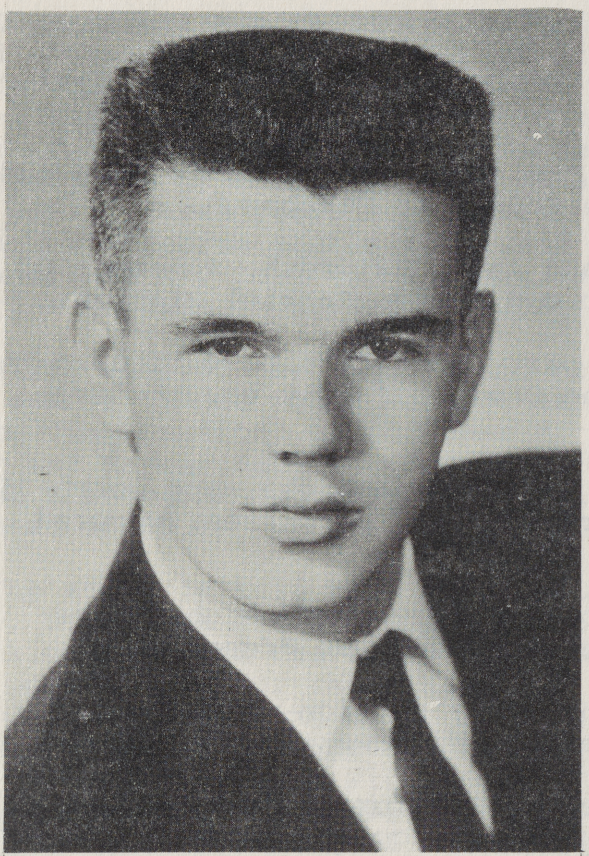
The Daulton lands were north of Madera in the hilly section which still bears his name. The Hildreth holdings comprised the Wideawake Ranch.

The bringing of the first large herd of sheep to California is credited to Jonathan Rea I, and the honor of driving cattle to this county belongs to Henry Clay Daulton. He drove the cattle for the Hildreth brothers. Later Daulton started in the sheep business when Rea gave him 1,000 sheep to raise on shares.

Jonathan (Jock) Rea II



Jonathan Rea III



Jonathan Rea IV

Jonathan Rea V

When reading the Daulton story in Vol. IX-3, much of the Rea story is included, as this journey across the plains involved several very early Madera County pioneers.

Jonathan Rea I settled in the area known as "Buchanan Hollow", later Buchanan. Mr. Rea acquired a large acreage, some researchers 17,000, 18,000 or 20,000 acres, but whatever is correct, it was still a large holding and land measuring was never too accurate in the early days in Madera County. He built a home similar to the Hildreth and Daulton homes, large two story, and as Agnes Bradford recalls there were three bedrooms upstairs, one downstairs, one downstairs, parlor, a big fireplace, dining room, large kitchen, a pantry and of course a big basement.

This home was located about five miles south west of Buchanan. What history could be written if only there were people living who could recall the happenings in the three well known two story homes, two of them still standing, and are occupied; the Rea home burned in 1926.

The Rea ranch was sold to David Hayes after Jonathan passed away.

Jonathan Rea I died September 5, 1904 and was buried in the Raymond Cemetery. (There seems to be some disagreement about the exact date of his death. One family member says he died in 1897.) At that time they no longer allowed burials in home cemeteries. There is a stone on his grave but we cannot decipher a date. The second Mrs. Rea is buried in Stockton.

None of the children of Jonathan Rea I are living today.

Ann Elizabeth Rea married John G. McKee in 1879. Their story is most interesting. When Ann Elizabeth was 17 she went to live with her aunt Jane Daulton at Shepherds' Home or the Daulton Ranch. It was here she met her husband. Mr. McKee was foreman for his uncle James who was raising sheep and renting the land from Henry Clay Daulton I. All of the McKee men were from Ireland. There is a place in Pennsylvania, McKee Port, named after this family as many of them settled there before coming to California. John's Uncle James gave him 5,000 sheep to start out.

Ann Elizabeth and John were married at the old Rea ranch. They lived on what was then known as the Morton Ranch, later they moved to the Hatch and Service Ranch, (about 7 miles from Borden). Agnes Bradford and her brother Charles were born here. There were seven children, Agnes, Sam, Robert, James, Ray, Charles and Stanley. The only one living today is Agnes McKee Bradford. She resides at 909 Lincoln in Madera.

Mr. McKee engaged in sheep raising and later grain farming, farming the land known for years as the Archibald Ranch.

In 1890 Mr. McKee built the home on the corner of Tulare and Lincoln, in Madera and moved into town so the children could attend school. This old two story house still stands and is occupied; a mute testimony that "they built well in those days".

Mr. McKee also farmed what is now known as the Schwabacher place. Mr. McKee purchased it in 1907 and after he passed away, his wife Ann kept it until 1943 when it was sold to Charles Floto, nephew of Mrs. Mayme Saunders Moses. Mr. McKee bought it from Rosenthal of Rosenthal and Kutner.

John G. McKee passed away in 1926, Ann Elizabeth in 1948. She was Queen of "Old Timer's Day" in 1947. Mr. William Tighe was King.

Agnes McKee married Lawrence Montague Bradford in 1911. They lived first at Mt. Bullion in Mariposa County the first year then at the site of the Green Mountain Copper Mine for one year then they ran the Old Daulton Copper Mine. This was sold in 1953.

Mr. Bradford died in 1953. Agnes is still very active in Eastern Star, the Rebekah Lodge, the Methodist Church and the Madera County Historical Society.

In order to visualize the entire Rea family and their ties to Madera County we are recording a family tree or partial one at least.

Jonathan Rea I--Wife - Agnes Hildreth
Children- 1. Son - could not secure his name
2. Daughter - Mary Jane
3. Daughter - Ann Elizabeth
4. Daughter - Eleanor (often called Nellie)

Son: Died when very small, he was drowned in a horse trough. Father did not hear about the death until six months later. Jonathan Rea I was at Buchanan Hollow building the home and looking after sheep. The rest of the family were still living down in Los Angeles County. Buchanan did not get a postoffice until 1873 so mail was slow to reach these early settlers.

Daughter Mary Jane married Tom Brock. They had eleven children, 3 boys, 8 girls. One daughter is still living, Mrs. Evelyn Jensen of Coalinga.

Daughter Ann Elizabeth married John G. McKee in 1879. They had 7 children, Agnes, Sam, Robert, Ray, Charles, James and Stanley.

Daughter Eleanor married Albert A. McCumber. They had one child, Blanch. Blanch became Mrs. Richard Harder. They had 4 children, Allen Harder living at Concord, California and Mrs. Jack (Lois) Jantz residing in Madera, and two no longer living. Allen Harder has been extremely interested in Madera County History. He has written several articles of interest for the Sierra Star and also for several magazines. Blanch Harder says she remembers her grandfather, Jonathan Rea I as a very kind man, friendly and good to his neighbors. She said the Jonathan Rea family was very seldom without guests at meal time. Always someone driving or riding by and was invited in to take potluck.

Eleanor Rea McCumber died in 1886 when Blanch was eight months old, and later on Albert McCumber married Mary Frances Stapp, Clarence McCumber of McCumber and Pinion in Madera, is their son and a half brother of Blanch McCumber Harder, Ethel McCumber, sister of Clarence was the first wife of G. V. (Val) Pinion of McCumber and Pinion.

(When seeking information we found an old scrap book containing news items about early Maderans, and one was a letter written to the Tribune from Mr. Albert McCumber in 1900, while he was in Alaska. Apparently a number of Maderans went up to Alaska to seek their fortunes. They did not remain very long and were glad to get back to Madera. He mentioned seeing the following people, W. K. Heiskell, Clint Tooker, Senator Goucher, Mr. McKee, Pat Grace, and several others. Mr. McCumber said "We are all singing that good old Methodist Song, 'Why Did I Leave My Happy Home?")

Mrs. Agnes Hildreth Rea, wife of Jonathan Rea I, passed away in 1864 and was buried on the Rea Ranch.

Jonathan Rea I, later married a widow, Mrs. Chidderson of Stockton.

From this marriage two more children were born; Jonathan Rea II and Lela.

Lela married William Murray. They had two children, Clyde, now living in San Francisco and Kyrle who died in 1966.

Jonathan Rea II or "Jock" as he was affectionately called by everyone around Madera married Catherine Lester. They had six children, Alice Rea Moody, Maud Rea Small, Lester Rea, who passed away in 1944. Florence Rea Phillips and [illegible] and Jonathan III twins, the twins were born in Grub Gulch. Jonathan III or John married Dorothy McClellan. They reside in Madera. They have one son Jonathan IV and 2 grandchildren, Susan and Jonathan V.

Jonathan Rea II or "Jock" was County Attendance Officer for 27 years, before this he mined in various parts of Madera County and just before becoming attendance officer he was city marshal. Most of the time he had no office, as some one remarked recently, "his office was a notebook in his pocket". Later he was given a file cabinet which sat on the desk of one of the staff members' desk in the County Superintendent of Schools' office. Jock Rea was always out; driving the rural roads, looking for children who were absent from school. He was a friend of the principals and teachers, and handled most absence problems directly with the parents. Mr. Rea retired in 1947 and passed away in 1965 at the age of 95. His wife, Catherine preceded him in death in 1957.

The descendants of the first Jonathan Rea, who came into then Mariposa County in 1857 represent a large group of people. As you look over these names you begin to realize the Rea's were a real part of Madera County.

As we read now about the two large dams to be constructed in Madera County we become interested in the early settlers of the areas where the dams will be. In relation to the Rea's, of course it is Buchanan Dam. At this writing, Congressman Harold T. (Biss) Johnson has announced that construction will start on the Dam by the spring of 1970.

Research shows that on August 7, 1863, initial filings were made by S. S. [illegible]nolds, William Plasket, Jonathan Rea and H. C. Daulton at Millerton. Others filed later. Buchanan had at least a 1000 population by 1870. The Buchanan Copper mines produced well for several years. By 1880 mining was no longer important to the people; cattle and sheep raising were more profitable.

(Since Mr. Jonathan Rea I was a sheep man it might be interesting to mention the taxation problem in those early days. Again quoting from the same scrap book was this statement: "A tax that was difficult to collect in the early days was that of the sheep men. They moved their sheep from place to place and it was hard to keep up with them, so the assessor and the tax collector went together over the country and as soon as the assessment was made they collected the money right there. In those days it was a dangerous job to be a tax collector as often they carried large sums of money and it was quite common to be held up by robbers").

Today there are very few evidences of the town of Buchanan but very soon now we will hear the throb and noises of construction as this dam gets underway.

San Francisco State College Archeologists recently uncovered much about the Indians of this area but that's another story.

This record of the Rea family no doubt lacks details but it is impossible to contact everyone who would have knowledge. The Historian welcomes any further information and we will print it later if it seems pertinent to this history.

HISTORIAN

Historians are late! Yes, we know it but sometimes it is very difficult to secure all the information when you want it. We must read from many sources, interview family members, look for appropriate photographs. We are sorry but this time you will receive two at once. We'll try to do better in 1970.

GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY

We have received some beautiful Indian baskets and a "real" old gun, from the estate of Theresa Footman Denny.

We must have 500 items yet to be catalogued.

MATERIAL FOR HISTORIAN

Why don't you send in your family story or a story about some area in Madera. Give it to us in rough draft form. We will edit it and prepare it for printing.

BOOKS AVAILABLE

The M.C.H.S. has the following books for sale and will mail to you or you may come into the office and purchase.

1. Thunder In the Mountains by Hank Johnston - $6.95

2. Madera by Charles Clough - $2.95

3. Madera Lore, Emily Wagoman and Junior Class - $2.00.

CARDS AND NOTE PAPER

Recently you received complete information on the note paper and Christmas Cards our Society is printing. They have proved to be very popular. You may still order any of these items. They are of a high quality and they help increase our museum fund.

INFORMATION PLEASE

Our office has received an inquir about the family of Alexander Hust Butts. They were around Madera Coun in the 1860's through 1885. If you have any information on any family of this name please write to the Madera County Historical.

THE Madera County Historical contributors this quarter:

Mrs. Agnes Bradford - Madera
Mrs. Blanch Harder - Madera
Mrs. Eleanor Crooks - Ahwahnee
Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan Rea III - Madera
Madera Daily Tribune
Managing Editors - The Board of Directors
Compiled by Maud Lindeman, Curator

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